

CONSPIRACY STEREOTYPING AND PERCEPTIONS OF GROUP ENTITATIVITY OF JEWS, GERMANS, ARABS AND HOMOSEXUALS BY POLISH STUDENTS¹

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Summary.—The relationship among conspiracy stereotypes and perceived entitativity (the degree to which a collection of persons are perceived as being bonded together in a homogeneous entity) of Jews, Germans, Arabs, and homosexuals was examined. 63 volunteer university students answered the Conspiracy Beliefs Scale and the Group Entitativity Scale. The conspiracy stereotypes of all the categories were positively correlated with scores for perceived entitativity. The perception of entitativity seems to be an important factor in conspiracy stereotyping and therefore in inter-group relations.

The term entitativity was first introduced by Campbell (1958) to refer to the degree to which a collection of persons are perceived as being bonded together in a single, homogeneous entity. The perception of a group's entitativity depends on several factors, e.g., the degree of interactions between group members, the presence of common goals and common outcomes, the similarity of group members, and the importance of the group for its members (Lickel, Hamilton, Lewis, Sherman, Wierzchowska, & Uhles, 2000). Many empirical studies have indicated that group entitativity is an important factor underlying social perceptions (e.g., Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998; Castano, Yzerbyt, & Bourguignon, 2003). For instance, the perception of high entitativity involves the transfer of a stereotype of the group to all group members (Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002).

Conspiracy beliefs and conspiracy stereotypes can be observed in various countries (Quinley & Glock, 1983; Zonis & Joseph, 1994; Kofta & Sędek, 2005). A conspiracy stereotype is a holistic representation of the entire out-group as a conspiring collective enemy (Kofta, 1995; Kofta & Sędek, 2005). A conspiracy stereotype can be also defined as a set of general assumptions about the social world (Graumann & Moscovici, 1987; Kofta & Sędek, 2005). These stereotypes are based on the causal assumptions that an entire out-group is a highly integrated being, having intentions, values, pro-

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grams, and actions. Causality is attributed to the out-group's secret strivings for power and domination. The content of a conspiracy stereotype is universal, based on the "diabolic causation schema," according to which the out-group is perceived as secretly working out evil plans against the in-group and realising their plans with the help of dark powers (Groh, 1987; Kofta, 1995). The stereotype consists mainly of three elements: (1) an obsessive striving for power or domination, (2) acting in conspiracy, (3) high group egoism, i.e., high in-group solidarity and high supportiveness for in-groupers plus disregard for out-groupers' well-being (Kofta & Sędek, 2005).

Similar to the ideas above, according to Kofta and Sędek (2005), the content of a conspiracy stereotype implies that out-groupers share a common goal, for example to dominate the world, and that they develop coordinated actions to achieve this goal. Given such attitudes, it appears that the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes should be related to the perception of group entitativity. The results obtained by Kofta and Narkiewicz-Jodko (2001) suggest that there is a significant and positive correlation between conspiracy stereotypes and perceived group entitativity. Specifically in the study of Kofta and Narkiewicz-Jodko (2001), Polish participants estimated entitativity and conspiracy stereotypes of Poland's nearest neighbors: Czechs, Ukrainians, Germans, Lithuanians, Russians, and additionally Jews (see also Kofta & Sędek, 2005). Despite the fact that nowadays Jews constitute only .03% of the Polish population, the stereotypes of Jews were the most salient.

The current study extended these groups by examining the relationship between conspiracy stereotypes and the perceived entitativity of Jews, Germans, Arabs, and homosexuals. The aim of the study was to replicate the results obtained by Kofta and Narkiewicz-Jodko (2001) (see also Kofta & Sędek, 2005). Despite the fact that the Polish population is homogeneous with regard to ethnicity and nationality, it was decided to include Arabs in the study. After the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the subsequent terrorist attacks in Europe (e.g., Madrid and London) Arabs may be perceived as dangerous and conspiring. Additionally, it was examined if the relation between conspiracy stereotype and perceived group entitativity may hold for other social categories beyond nationalities. Homosexuals were chosen as an additional social category. It was hypothesized that the higher the scores for conspiracy stereotype of a specific group, the higher the perceived entitativity of this group.

Method.—The study was conducted in Warsaw, Poland, in November 2006. Subjects were 63 volunteer students of the University of Warsaw (54 women and 9 men, all Caucasian) with a mean age of 24.5 yr. ($SD=4.0$). They participated in the study as a volunteer class exercise. No reward was offered for participation.

In the first section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate each of the categories (Jews, Germans, Arabs, and homosexuals) on six properties: the extent to which each one can be qualified as a group, the density of within-group interactions, the importance of group identity for its members, the similarity of group members, the group common fate, and common goals (Lickel, *et al.*, 2000). As the original study by Lickel, *et al.* (2000) was conducted both in the United States of America and in Poland, the Polish version of the questionnaire was used (see also Kofta & Narkiewicz-Jodko, 2001; Kofta & Sędek, 2005). The participants rated each group on a 9-point Likert-type scale. The anchors of this 9-point scale differed between the items. For instance, the anchors for the first item were from 1: Not a group at all to 9: Very much a group. The total score on this measure is a sum of all item scores, ranging from 9 to 54. The higher the score, the higher the perceived group entitativity. Cronbach alpha for the whole scale ranged from .82 (Germans) to .86 (Arabs).

After estimating the group entitativity, participants were given the 18-item Conspiracy Beliefs Scale, which consists of three subscales: Power Strivings, Acting in Conspiracy, Group Egoism (Kofta & Narkiewicz-Jodko, 2001; see also Kofta & Sędek, 2005). The participants were asked to express, on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1: Strongly disagree to 5: Strongly agree, their agreement or disagreement with a set of statements about Jews, Arabs, Germans, and homosexuals. An example item is "Members of this group often act under cover or in a secret way."

The total score on the Conspiracy Beliefs Scale is the sum of all item scores. These range from 18 to 90. The higher the score, the higher the intensity of conspiracy stereotype. The internal consistency of the whole Conspiracy Beliefs Scale is high, with Cronbach alphas from .91 (Germans) to .97 (Jews).

Results.—The subscales of the Conspiracy Beliefs Scale were analyzed together as they are highly correlated with each other: for attitudes toward Jews: Power Strivings and Group Egoism, $r = .87$ ($p < .001$); Power Strivings and Acting in Conspiracy, $r = .88$ ($p < .001$); Acting in Conspiracy and Group Egoism, $r = .86$ ($p < .01$). The strongest intensity of Conspiracy Stereotype was found for attitudes towards Arabs ($M = 47.7$, $SD = 19.1$), the weakest for attitudes towards homosexuals ($M = 38.5$, $SD = 12.3$). To investigate the possible relation between the Perceived Entitativity and Conspiracy Stereotype of each group, correlational analyses were conducted. The Conspiracy Stereotypes of all the categories were positively correlated with Entitativity. The Conspiracy Stereotype for Jews ($M = 43.5$, $SD = 17.5$) was correlated most strongly with the Entitativity of Jews ($M = 25.3$, $SD = 9.8$; $r = .67$, $p < .001$). Conspiracy Stereotype for Arabs ($M = 47.7$, $SD = 19.1$) was correlated with group Entitativity of Arabs ($M = 25.4$, $SD = 10.3$; $r = .65$, $p < .001$), and Con-

spiracy Stereotype for Germans ($M=39.1$, $SD=13.4$) was correlated with group Entitativity of Germans ($M=21.8$, $SD=8.4$; $r=.53$, $p<.001$). The Conspiracy Stereotype for homosexuals ($M=38.5$, $SD=12.3$) was correlated with Entitativity of homosexuals ($M=26.8$, $SD=9.7$; $r=.38$, $p<.005$).

Discussion.—The results suggest that there is a relation between the strength of the perceived conspiracy stereotype of a group and the perceived entitativity of the group. The perception of entitativity seems to be an important factor in conspiracy stereotyping and therefore in intergroup relations. The results imply that if an out-group is perceived as conspiring against in-groupers, the out-group is also perceived as coherent and possessing high entitativity. This pattern of results is consistent with the theoretical framework of Kofta and Sędek (2005; see also Kofta, 1995). It supports the thesis that conspiracy stereotype is a holistic representation of an entire out-group (Kofta, 1995; Kofta & Sędek, 2005).

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